



PORTALS

Volume XVII Fall 1988



PORTALS

PURDUE UNIVERSITY NORTH CENTRAL
STUDENT WRITING

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Volume 17

Fall 1988

PORTALS

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FOREWORD

This seventeenth edition of *Portals* is presented with pride to those who love and respect Purdue University North Central. By sharing in the accomplishments of the students whose writing is published in this journal, we hope to foster a greater understanding of the spirit of an academic community. A quick glimpse reveals clearly not only the talent but also the diversity of interests and personalities to be found within our student body.

Whether written by a recent high school graduate, a more mature reentry student, a native-born or an adopted citizen, each work was selected because of its originality and excellence of content and style. As in the past, the writing contest was sponsored by the English Department, with entries judged anonymously by both faculty and students. Prizes were funded from proceeds of PU/NC's annual book sale.

Director and Editor,
Student Writing Contest

Professor Barbara Lootens

Faculty Judges

Dr. Thomas Young
Dr. Patricia Buckler
Dr. Scott Smithson

Student Judges

Michal Mitol
Patricia Pettila
Heidi Wesley

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RAY'S PACE

by Janet Carlson

I tucked in behind Ray when we got to the heavily-trafficked road, then conscientiously synchronized my stride with his so that we skimmed along the shoulder as a single unit. The repeated pounding became exaggerated from the double soles smashing down in unison, and the loud rhythm became a drill sergeant's voice calling out relentless demands. I loved the fluid movement when I ran at Ray's pace; and even though it began to pull breath from me, I did not drop back until I was completely winded.

I think he was being kind to me; when we banked around the corner, he slowed until he was by my side. That was typical of Ray. In all my life I had never seen him act out of selfishness or maliciousness. He had a gentle, silent way about him that always seemed to grant respect. And just as his running came with ease and grace, so did his living.

"You know, Jan, I was thinking," and Ray began to divulge his latest technical discovery to me in the rhythm of our run. Certainly he knew I had no real basis for judging his theories. I had not even a minute fraction of his vast knowledge, yet he shared his ideas with me as his equal.

I listened intently and wisely, just as he would have. At times I would recognize fragments of knowledge I had collected from our previous exchanges: I would pluck them out of the conversation, arrange them in some sort of logical sequence in my mind, then make my response with as much calculation as a chessmaster in a tournament. It was amusing to try to match pace with a man of such brilliance. Perhaps for him, though, it was merely amusement like a large cat toying and batting about a mouse.

"Listen Ray, if you want to, go ahead," and my words surged out between gasps for air, "Go on." Then after another short block, I watched him pull away from me. He was tall and lean, and probably carrying no more than a meager ten percent body fat. His muscles were well defined but not exaggerated. And he still looked like a youth. It would take a quick eye to catch the smooth, polished patch that lay atop his thinning hair, nature's cruel joke insisting he mature. But in no other way had middle age threatened him; and I doubted that it ever would. He seemed immortal.

Throughout my whole life, I had moved side by side with my brother, and the decades had not changed our pattern. When I was a child, still too young to be told the truths about tooth fairies and Santa Claus, even then I half-walked and half-ran down country roads alongside Ray. He seemed to find great pleasure in telling his little sister awesome stories about evolving planets and sun eclipses. I was too young to comprehend all he was saying, but I remember the waves of excitement that would wash over me from all my new discoveries. That thrill is still there. But, he is no longer just my big brother; he has become my friend.

A broad, yet modest smile stretched across Ray's face as he returned to my path. He had almost doubled my distance since he left me, and his blue eyes gleamed with his refreshed vigor. I suddenly became aware of my waning speed, so I picked up the pace in effort to match his pace once again.

We bounded the corner to the busy road, but this time Ray tucked in behind me. We were almost home, flying like Mercury through the heavens. The internal happiness that churned within me no longer could be contained, and it burst out into a broad smile across my face, too.

That was a good run, Ray. As usual, a good run.

OUT OF CONTROL

by Suzan Hamilton

A drug addict is someone who is obsessive, irrational, manipulative, deceptive, and self-destructive. What starts out as occasional recreational drug use, for many, can be the beginning of a cycle of drug dependency and withdrawal from reality. Drug addiction is an incurable, progressive, and often fatal disease that destroys hundreds of thousands of people each year. Although science has yet to find a cure for drug addiction, it is possible for addicts to learn to live without drugs. Some succeed; more fail.

I witnessed first-hand the devastating impact that drugs had on four good friends of mine.

A close friend of mine was an addict, living for drugs and willing to die for drugs. She started out like many drug abusers, experimenting with marijuana, D-lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), heroin, amphetamines (speed), cocaine, barbiturates, morphine, etc. By the age of fifteen, she found pharmaceutical amphetamines to be her drug of choice. It was easy for her to get because her mom took speed too, and it was profitable because many of her friends would buy it from her. This was the beginning of what she thought was a good thing.

As I think back to that time in her life when she began using drugs, I know it seemed like innocent fun. At least she thought it was fun, and after she lost control of her life, being high was the only way to be. Everyone she knew and everything she did was for drugs. What started out as a few pills a day quickly progressed into needles in her arms. By the time she was twenty, her life was a disaster. She was living with whoever would take her, and, day by day, her drug dependency worsened. She would take too much speed and then have to take some downers to come down a little. She was living on a roller-coaster and trying to find a happy medium. Physically and mentally, she was drained. She had been in and out of jails, detoxification centers, and rehabilitation centers. Nothing stopped her. Finally her body surrendered, and she overdosed. Medically she should have died, but after she recovered from the overdose and was treated for severe malnutrition and hepatitis, she was given a choice. She could go on her own to a rehabilitation center or be committed by the state. Thank God, she gave in and went to a drug treatment center.

She left Des Moines, Iowa, where she'd been living before going into treatment, and is now living a productive life without the use of drugs. The drug world is a dark world of its own, but for those who survive or escape its death grip, there is hope. I know because the close friend I've been describing is me.

While I was in the drug rehabilitation center, I made two good friends whom I'll call Karen and John. They came from different places, different family backgrounds, and different states, but they shared one thing in common: they were addicts.

Karen came from an upper-class family that was very well known because her father was a senator. She grew up with a lot of social pressure and found drugs to be an easy way to cope. Karen became dependent on drugs, and the trouble began. When Karen was desperate, she stole from her mother and father to support her drug habit. She was caught stealing money from her parents several times but denied it every time. Karen refused any attempts by her family to help her come clean from the drug scene, and finally they kicked her out of their house. She learned the hard way, soon finding out that everyone is equal on the street. After she was found beaten up and robbed, her family had her committed into a rehabilitation center. Karen didn't want to get help, so she was in and out of the rehabilitation center and back on the streets.

Karen was arrested in 1987 for several drugstore break-ins and is possibly going to go to prison. Now she is trying to learn to live straight, without drugs, but it may be too late. And then there was John.

John was a businessman in his late forties when I met him at the drug rehab center. He had been a successful salesman for many years until he entered the drug world. He started snorting cocaine on weekends or at parties just to fit in, but as time went on and John was exposed to more available cocaine, he started to buy it on his own.

John's cocaine use began interfering with his work performance, yet he denied his problem. He was lying to his friends and co-workers and giving them excuses for his behavior. His life was going downhill until a good friend of his saw what was happening and helped him get his life in order again.

John's life is similar to many stories about recreational drug users in the professional world. He didn't hit bottom, but he came close. John decided to get help before his cocaine habit took complete control of his life or took his life. John was smart, and he got out of the drug world before it was too late.

A friend of mine from the streets wasn't able to get out in time. Larry was what is known on the streets as a "spoon goon." Having a needle in his arm was all he needed, even if he was shooting up water. Larry liked cocaine and crystal (methedrine or speed), and he would do anything for a high. He stole money and drugs from anyone who was around. Larry lost everything of any value to him, even though his family still tried to help him when it could. Convincing Larry to go to a drug treatment program was out of the question. His life was going nowhere. There were people in the drug world that were going to kill Larry because he had stolen from them, but Larry saved them the trouble.

One look in Larry's eyes told the story of a man ruined by drugs. His eyes, once a beautiful color of green were now blood-red and glassy. His blonde hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and his clothes were badly soiled. Larry was sitting slouched down on the floor, leaning up against the wall with his feet crossed out in front of him. Suddenly Larry said, "Oh no, here it comes!" He grabbed his chest, gasped for air, and dropped over dead. Larry was only thirty-three years old.

The most difficult time for an addict is dealing with the good and bad times in life without being high. Learning to live straight takes time, but there is hope. Addicts can learn to live straight. It definitely isn't easy, but it can be done. I am existing proof.

LOVE IS BLIND

by Sheilah Langdon

Love has numerous effects on its victims. Palpitating hearts, butterflies in the stomach, wandering minds, and blindness are the most common. These symptoms vary in degree and frequently attack all at once like a flash flood of diarrhea. The body can easily recover from most effects, but not blindness, which is the most dangerous.

Blindness is defined as the inability to see. Some people pretend to have this inability when their neighbor is cheating on his wife, when the store clerk forgets to ring up an item, or the cashier hands back an extra five dollar bill. But when love hits, there is no pretending; blindness becomes a reality.

The reality of both love and blindness hit me twelve years ago, when I met my husband to be. He was tall, dark haired, and handsome. He even had a mustache. His eyes were loving and sincere. He had the wit and humor of Alan Alda and manners that even my mother would have been proud of. My heart fluttered. This guy was perfect.

How can this be? I was taught that nobody was perfect. I decided there must be a "catch" somewhere and was determined to find it. I searched for a clue on our frequent dates. But after the first kiss and an "I love you", I was lured even deeper in love and became totally overcome with side effects. This guy was not only perfect but was wonderful as well. How could I ever let him go?

Due to my desire to be with him forever, I said, "Yes" to his marriage proposal, and we were married. Our future together promised to be a blissful one. Like Cinderella and Snow White, I was going to live happily ever after with my perfect charming prince.

But after a few months of marriage, I began to question the "happily ever after" part of our story. One morning my prince didn't brush his teeth before he kissed me. On another, he came to the breakfast table with ratty hair and an unshaven face. His compliments about my dress and cooking abilities grew less frequent. On some days, he was a little "grouchy" and on others "a lot grouchy". He often became more interested in Monday night football than in me. He started leaving his dirty clothes on the floor for me to pick up and continuously left the cap off the toothpaste tube.

What kind of prince would leave the cap off the toothpaste, expect his wife to pick up his dirty underwear, and ignore her for a lousy football game? Something was wrong. Something was changing; I was beginning to see. My eyes open, I suddenly had the ability to look at my husband clearly. My husband was not a prince. He was not perfect. Like everyone, he was a human being with faults, which I had been too blind to see. He was still wonderful, at least four days a week, but not perfect.

Perfect people and perfect relationships are impossibilities. But while under the influence of love, we put our lovers on a pedestal and worship them as gods. Their greatness is magnified. We believe in fairy tales and expect our relationships to remain in eternal bliss. Intoxicated, we deny faults and overlook crucial incompatibilities.

Love is blind, but marriage is an eye opener.

A CROSSROAD IN THE NIGHT

by Mai Nguyen

It was cold and damp on that dark evening of September 13, 1984. Near the Hai-Son River in a poor, little village of fishermen, there were five strangers in the corner of a house by the river. They looked pale and frightened, full of suspicion. The forty-year-old man in the worn out clothing looked around in suspense for the time to finally come. He took a few steps forward and backward. Sometimes he looked through the slot in the wall to the darkness. Then he sat down next to his wife, again keeping very quiet. The lady's hands embraced a nine-month-old child, and sitting next to her were two boys about four years old looking very frightened.

The weak, unsteady light which came from the lamp in the living room was about to be extinguished by the blowing wind. From the neighborhood came dogs' barking and the steps of someone walking in the quiet night. About two miles away by the river stood a police station with all kinds of light against the night and all kinds of armaments to capture or kill the people who tried to escape from Viet-Nam along that route.

Tonight, in this village, something was happening. There were many strangers quietly coming from many different places. Some had come here a few days ago; most of them just came today. Like the five people in that house, they stayed in small groups in many houses, waiting for the right time to escape by means of the river. Tonight was a remarkable night for them. Their fates were at a crossroad! One road would lead to freedom; the other would lead to death. Death is always easier than escape. For this reason they were frightened each and every second! Just one small mistake, and their bodies would become food for the fish in the sea.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

by Kevin Mulloy

Dr. Eib arose and dressed quietly. As he had done every day since he could remember, he began the routine check of the life-support system in his home. On this planet called Aeher, it has to operate at maximum ability. First, the aquifer must be circulating the correct amount of water through the home. If the water is breathed too long without agitating it, it becomes toxic. Second, the ultraviolet light-converters have to be operating, for the only source of light on Aeher is that which is produced by the light-converters.

His chores completed, Dr. Eib walked through the kitchen on his way to the transport. Then, after lighting the transport, he moved out into the darkness of the exteriorphere (on Aeher, any space outside of the controlled atmosphere of the home is considered exteriorphere), driving the two miles to the laboratory in silence.

On his current project dealing with the possibility of "visible-light" and the "electromagnetic spectrum," Dr. Eib felt that he was making some headway. Indeed, his latest report, he had written the following:

“After considerable experimentation, we have reached a decision. Even though the theory of visible-light is still largely conjecture, we feel confident that it is only a matter of time before we can prove that visible-light exists. Soon, our scientists should be able to perforate the shield above Aeher’s atmosphere -- in a controlled experiment -- to see if there is a potential frontier existing beyond our own. We feel very confident that this new frontier could lend valuable insights to Aeher. We also feel strongly that our planet’s outer covering could be the inhibitor that prevents any visible-light, if in fact visible-light does exist, from entering our atmosphere.”

The doctor sat down at his desk to re-evaluate his notes. Then, at precisely 1:52 p.m. the planet of Aeher went into a “Debcon-Two” alert. To be categorized as a Debcon-Two emergency, the situation had to be serious, for debcon system consisted of only four alarms. The first was a national attention alarm. The second alarm was used as a “world alert” alarm. The third alarm was to be used only in the case of possible destruction to the planet of Aeher. Since its installation over ten-thousand years ago, the third alarm had never been used. The fourth alarm, the product of a religious group’s request, the scientists jokingly called the “end-of-the-world” alarm. It was to be sounded only when the destruction of Aeher was inevitable.

Suddenly, the alarm went to Debcon-Three. At the same time, Dr. Eib became aware that the main-line phone from National Science Headquarters was ringing. Dr. Eib answered it and heard a voice shouting that a fissure had been discovered in the upper exteriorphere. All inhabitants of the immediate danger zone were being evacuated. Some inhabitants and rescuers had been injured by something moving in through the fissure.

Within minutes, Dr. Eib was on his way to the fissure site, where a lifetime of study and knowledge would have to be put to the supreme test. Dr. Eib was given the familiar test-ship, which he had used many times before in his explorations of the upper exteriorphere.

With the test-ship running in “automatic pilot,” Dr. Eib was able to concentrate his attention on the processing computer. He began to analyze the preliminary results. From the nature of the injuries to the inhabitants near the fissure zone, Dr. Eib speculated that the cause of the injuries was mostly trauma, with most of the injured suffering from shock. Then, a contact from N.S.H. informed him that the sickness was much more severe than previously thought. In addition to the previous symptoms, the patients were suffering from severe burns and loss of eyesight. Suddenly, it became clear to Dr. Eib that the patients were suffering from radiation sickness caused by visible-light!

A red-alert on the test-ship’s control panel confirmed Dr. Eib’s suspicion. A check of the computer showed that “visible-light” had been recognized by the computer. Visible-light had caused the red-alert to sound. Dr. Eib felt a thrill of fear as he announced his discovery to N.S.H., “The theory dealing with visible-light has been confirmed. There is visible-light surrounding this test-ship.”

Inside the test-ship, a second red-alert sounded. The computer showed unexpectedly high levels of toxic hydrogen and oxygen in the exteriorphere. A second hazardous condition had now been added to the radiation problem. The test-ship was totally surrounded by the deadly liquid. Dr. Eib knew that the only thing saving him was the test-ship’s internal life-support systems, for the very exterior phere of the planet Aeher was being poisoned by the liquid toxin moving in through the fissure! A quick look at the computer analysis of the entire plane of Aeher showed him a spreading of the

deadly toxin. Within thirty seconds, one third of the planet was being wiped out. In a frantic attempt to save N.S.H., Dr. Eib tried to warn the scientists of the coming disaster. The line between N.S.H. and the test-ship was silent.

A glance at the computer screen showed that the toxin had reached ninety percent of the planet. Dr. Eib watched in disbelief as the toxin reached the last corner of the screen. Quickly scanning the emergency band on the computer's communication segment, he saw no sign of life from anywhere on the planet.

Dr. Eib noticed a third red-alert. Contamination of the interior of the test-ship had registered on the monitor. It would be only a matter of time before the toxin overtook him. Dr. Eib prepared to make the last observation of his life. In the final thirty seconds before he broke through the fissure, the toxin began to take its toll. Still, when the test ship broke through the frontier atmosphere, the doctor was coherent enough to make out the details that the computer was recording:

"Atmospheric conditions beyond familiar exteriorphere unique. No bonds between the hydrogen and oxygen present. In frontier atmosphere, Aeher's life forms unable to survive."

The area surrounding the test-ship was bathed in visible-light, which revealed the bottom of the test-ship resting on the very top of the exteriorphere of Aeher. The top of the test-ship floated aimlessly in the frontier atmosphere.

"So much to learn," the doctor thought, "and no time left to learn it." As a final gesture from his dying world, Dr. Eib pushed the alert button he had so often scorned. As the test-ship began to sink back into Aeher's exteriorphere, every computer laboratory on Aeher picked up the signal, "Debcon-Four."

"Damn," Mary said with a disgusted look on her face. "I don't know why Bob doesn't do this chemical stuff himself. He'll really be mad when he finds out that I poured a whole bottle of this algaecide into the waterbed. I should have read the label first. It does say to use only a quarter-bottle of the stuff. I'll bet I killed every speck of algae."

Mary made her usual inspection of the waterbed. The temperature had to be set at eighty-five degrees or Bob would be mad. As she prepared to put the lid on the fill-valve of the waterbed, Mary noticed a barely perceptible piece of "algae" drifting down from the surface-film and into the darkness of the water. "Must have been some kind of a bug or something. I hope that I got all of them."

Mary headed outside to work in the flower garden. As she walked, she thought, "In a flower garden, there is a whole world of life that nobody every thinks about."

THE MIXING OF FIRE AND WATER

by David Grau

The time is unimportant. The place is called Bissini. You are the ruler. Your power is absolute. You are Peter the Great and Caesar. You are Machiavelli and Ghandi.

The people of Bissini are inhabitants of a secluded valley. The corruption of the world has not yet crept in upon them. They are well protected. Peace and contentment has eclipsed progress and growth. As their wise and just ruler, you understand that this solitude cannot last forever. This is not good for the people.

After many days of contemplation, you hand down to the people your first proclamation. It is entitled *Awareness*. In it you stipulate that the people must learn and study all that is frightening to them as well as that which is pleasurable. The educators are instructed to teach good ideas alongside bad ideas so that comparisons may be drawn. The minds will learn to think. The people must grow. The needs of the many must give way for the survival of the few.

With your second proclamation, you destroy the padlocks on the library doors. The dungeons are opened to release the protestors and dissidents along with their words. Like a Pandora's box, shadows and spectres stream forth to fill every corner and crevice of the Kingdom. Against the wishes of your advisors, you appoint these people to teach in the Kingdom's universities. With them go the forbidden books and pamphlets, the propaganda and trash. The peace and contentment of the valley has been shattered. The people are frightened and outraged. They are alive.

From your turret window you direct the workers to take hammers to the walls surrounding the city. You fear the evil that will inevitably crawl over the ruins and infect the people. You fear the influence of other political leaders, corrupt and self serving in their flowery oratory. But even more, you fear the ignorance of your people. You want your subjects to understand that evil must be recognized before good can be appreciated.

You direct your people to build laboratories and schools. You have provided for research centers to probe for the limits of the universe and the mind. New ideas topple old customs. Chests are bared as the clothes of tradition are stripped away and replaced with the nakedness of the unknown. God is questioned and examined. No one speaks out yet, but there is a murmuring borne about on the previously quiet breeze.

Many years have passed and your people have learned the ways of others. They are in the streets. They are at your doorstep. They are disjointed in their efforts, preferring separate means to various ends. The faces of the men and women are not happy. You issue a proclamation for peace throughout the land and they laugh and say, "You are not our god. You are man." The crumbling remains of the walls are trampled by footsteps bringing in words of other lands and by footsteps setting out to discover and explore. Books fill the shelves, and writings cover the tables.

You are burned in effigy.

Your rule is ended.

The power, the hope, the future...it is in the hands of the many.

The time is now. The place is called Meric. You are the elected ruler. You are the guiding force. Through your great wealth, you have risen to the pinnacle of respect and esteem. You stand on the doorstep of the kingdom, looking out at the throngs of uneducated and undernourished. As their ruler, you understand that this condition must not continue. Like your counterpart in Bissini, their future lies in your hands. The moment is yours.

Your first decree is released to the people. In it you stress the need for conformity. The time has come to work together for a common cause, you tell them. We must unite in our beliefs and values and pull together as a whole. From this bond of unity shall come strength. The needs of the few must be sacrificed for the needs of the many.

You have created a new economic/political system to give your people meaning and purpose. The needs of the many are provided for. Smaller branches of government utilize the fruitful labors of the masses, dispensing pride and hope in plain envelopes. These branches support the educational endeavors of the universities and drink of the intellects. Learning is given physical purpose.

The words of the dreamers and idealists have been suppressed. Their thoughts do not please the people. Your system of enterprise demands knowledge of profits and provisions to care for the hungry. Idealists harvest no food for the stomach to digest. Your methods provide sustenance for the pawns, those who accept the goal but are starved of the means. To the victor go the spoils. These are the people's wishes. The wind carries with it the sound of applause.

The cities have grown upward toward the heavens. The boundaries of knowledge have grown narrower in keeping with the needs of the kingdom. To protect your people and their fragile intellects, you command the workers to build walls around the Kingdom. You safely lock away the written and spoken words that now serve only to confuse and confound. Despite the world of turmoil and bloodshed, you can rest assured that the subjects within your kingdom will sleep tonight with smiles upon their faces. Contentment will caress their minds.

Many years have passed, and the cities are quiet. From the windows of the buildings comes the sound of a Kingdom at rest. The problems of the outer world are filtered and muted. The compassion is momentary. The understanding is fleeting. Wars have come and gone and the people remain united, fighting as one, working as one, living as one. There are no emigrants - no one wants to leave this paradise called Meric. Authors cater to the wishes of the masses - it is necessary if they are to eat.

The books of change are burned.

Your rule is extended. You are praised as great.

The power, the hope, the future...it is in the hands of the few.

THE VIEW

by Susan Bortell

The front window always looks dirty. Though I've spent countless hours and "skillions" of dollars on Windex, the view remains the same. The purpose of the basic construction of a thermopane window is to trap all the warm INSIDE. There are two panes of glass with air space between them; these are sealed with rubberized weatherstripping. This unique design should give me an airtight window area; I should be wallowing in the warmth. However, because of its advanced years, the window doesn't seal; the panes are filled with moisture and insects rather than air. When I look through the window, I have images of being underwater during a biology experiment.

Even though this glass contraption gives me problems, it's still my movie screen, my stereo system, and my VCR all rolled into one. As I sit in my favorite chair and stare through the ancient glass, I see so much.

I look at the center circle of my apartment complex. It contains exactly four blades of grass, six trees with few branches, and what all the residents laughingly refer to as our "park area" (that's one bench and 60 pounds of doggy waste).

Between the "park" and our parking lot lies the long black tongue of asphalt that's our driveway. Painted on the end of the tongue closest to the building (sort of a tonsil portion) are the bright yellow letters that spell "NO PARKENG". The painter obviously does not teach English part-time. In this area there are usually three cars parked. It seems clear that literacy is not a residency requirement.

As I sit here, coffee in hand, cats in lap, I watch the world in which I live awaken to greet a new day. The very world that sometimes holds me captive also affords me a look at reality.

The woman in the apartment on my right has three children she's trying to raise alone. The woman on my left has seven kids she hasn't seen in years. They play it as they see it, I guess. The right side gives me screaming, crying, ball bouncing, and olympic step jumping. Though the noise is difficult to deal with, it's easier to accept than the non-stop Michael Jackson tribute that plays for 20 hours a day from the apartment on my left. My "stereo" runs at all hours.

I look out my window again and pray for alien beings to wisk me away to the planet Nebulon where I would become their Queen. I have, on occasion, also prayed for the institution of retroactive abortion for those on my right and a complete power failure for those on my left.

Ah, here comes the dashing playboy father of the children next door. He parks his NEW Chevrolet (she drives a car that is life threatening) in the "NO PARKENG" area. As he walks to the door, he deals, quite openly, with his underwear constriction. He knocks. No one comes to answer the door. He yells (at no one) and leaves.

The neighborhood children are all awake and outside playing now. I can hear them screaming through my window. These kids have never had many toys to play with; most of their games are violent. We have Chuck Norris, Rambo, The Incredible Hulk, The Transformers, and Bruce Lee living in our court.

These poor children have so much to learn. Sadly, there's nobody to teach them right from wrong. I'm convinced that at least one of them will someday become a mass murderer. They are all ten going on thirty; I hope that each one will live to see his twenty-first birthday. The chances are slim, but I still hold that dream.

VCR instant replay. Next door, part-time Father of the Year has returned carrying a bucket from the Colonel and a twelve pack of pop. Ex opens the door when he knocks (seems that her hearing has improved), and lets "Studly" inside. It will be quiet while they eat, and then the children will be sent outside so their parents can fight. Because our stairway walls meet, I have heard more about their sex life, bank account, drinking problems, infidelities, and car payments than I have ever, in this lifetime, wanted to know.

There is little beauty seen through my window. The sun rises and sets; the seasons change; the people move in and out; yet, all remains the same. This is a part, albeit just a tiny part, of the world in which these kids must grow to become adults. I would love to have the power, with wonder brush in hand, to repaint this grey world I view through my window. I'd color it with smiles and joy. These children would have SOMETHING wonderful to dream about, something to make them happy. There would be no more gloom and despair. Alas, the power escapes me.

My window offers a new view that remains the same--a contradiction? Certainly not. The world outside should be an ever-changing one. The people I see are caught in a time warp; they don't evolve; there is no change. I wonder if they are unaware or just trapped by the poverty they call their world. I want to scream at them, "There's more to life than this, folks; believe me, I've been there." Why bother? They wouldn't listen.

No, I'll just sit here, as countless others before me, and watch the bugs drown in their sealed prison. Their demise is quiet and quick; they accept their fate with calm resignation. How like the people walking free outside.

Is life really just a dirty window?

THE GREEN AND THE GRAY

by Joan Wiseman

I'm not like anybody else I know. Did growing up as the middle child in a large Catholic family in a small Indiana steel mill town make me different? You decide...

First of all, that "middle child" part may imply some weirdness. I did learn at any early age to be obsessively diplomatic. I had to do this in order to survive the confusion of a large competitive brood. I gained a safe perch in the middle of seven which afforded me a bird's-eye view of the even split of the three combatants on either side. They ganged up in their threes a lot, leaving me safely out of harm's way, glad to be left alone and unbruised.

These days a déjà vu tranquility overwhelms me when I see people arguing and I am not a part of their fracas. Downright gleeful, I may even chuckle out loud. I usually steer clear of other people's trouble unless specifically asked to join in. Far too diplomatic, I can usually argue equally well for both points of view.

Did growing up in a large family scew me up? No, my parents outfitted us for a good, happy life as they welcomed us into the world and their lives, and made us feel great about being alive. With their touching and talking, singing and rocking, making googly faces to get just one more wriggly, gummy, wet baby smile--they impress on our fresh, moldable senses the warmth surrounding us.

Later on, we roamed together, little hand trusting big, into another pleasant environment--outside in the fresh air. In all weather, we trekked in the green woods and earned our place in nature as we explored and touched, tasted and sniffed.

Damp swampy areas yielded green-algae-covered ponds chirping with gold leopard frogs we loved to scare up, old farmer's fields were full of sweet flowers to pick and color our noses with as we inhaled deeply, briar patches stubbornly gave up their deep purple blackberries in bucketsful to the careful and violet-fingered pickers, and hazelnuts were treasures to discover, half-hidden in fall-tinted low bushes, quickly, before the squirrels got there. Our stomping grounds were jealously guarded as our own special domain.

These were the types of things that came to matter at our house, with intelligent, practical parents leading the way. They taught us the values they had adopted, two that were crucial--honesty and a sense of humor, as a direct result of their having survived the Great Depression, when questionable business practices plunged the whole nation into despair.

Mom and Dad taught us to tell the truth--I will be blunt or silent rather than lie. At the same time they taught us the value of a funny streak that can lift moods when they are in need of lifting. More often than not, I can make someone laugh if I put my silliness to work.

Another part of my growing up was membership in the Catholic Church. Did the church render me strange? Yes. I knew this at an early age when my best buddy Susanne Sickles informed me, a timid first grader: Nuns are weird...yucch...they shave their heads and smash their breasts down flat with elastic bandages so they don't look too pretty!! Creepy! All I could manage to say was a wide-eyed Wow! It was plausible; maybe it was why they were so mean.

Those School Sisters of Notre Dame were tough on us as they drilled us in the basics. We learned out of necessity. They regulated and honed our little spirits down to make us submissive, shy, respectful, worried, guilty-feeling little people. My theory is: a kid-that-went-to-Catholic-School always knows right away another kid-that-went-to-Catholic-School. We have the same neuroses and, probably, identical mean nun stories.

Does the smallness of the town where I grew up have a direct relationship with my oddness? Perhaps. Chesterton, Indiana, was and still is a small, quaint, eccentric and provincial little berg. They still won't let any blacks in, except the Postmaster, and he doesn't count, he was appointed.

Fiercely Republican, Chesterton and Porter County comprise a Republican stronghold, encircled by counties teeming with Democrats. The John Birch (or birch john as we liked to say) Society's implausible billboards have often clamored "Impeach Earl Warren!" "Get US Out of the UN!" A fundamentalist cult calls my hometown home with their combination church/school/college and arsenal, which soothes their worries about Armageddon but only serves to alarm the residents of the town.

This Conservative ethic has caused an even political split in my family, with Dad on the one side--a Republican with a capital "R", and Mom on the other--an anti-Republican Democrat. She must laugh every time she casts her vote--she immediately cancels out his vote.

I sided with Mom at an early age, probably because she was so right about Nixon's being a rat. She announced it before Richard Milhaus was caught at it. So I chose her liberal tack, not a popular one in Chesterton or my house, but I'd really had my fill of John Birchers.

My small town outgrew its boundaries with the steel boom of the early 70's. I came back to see that whole blocks of new, monotonously similar houses had magically appeared, destroying my old haunts. Rich green wooded areas had been scraped clean, to be paved, sodded, and subdivided. I was sickened.

How could they? Didn't they know what they were destroying? People need those buffer zones, the green of uncivilized areas to sooth their tired city eyes and minds. Why couldn't they see that?

They saw only what wasn't profitable. There's a real contrast of values in my homeland of northwestern Indiana. One look at the shoreline of Lake Michigan tells the whole story. I've looked at this scene from both sides of the lake and wondered about it for years.

The steel mills belch smoke off to the west of my town, a mere 15 miles away. Open hearth ovens color the sky an eerie Mars-like orange. This strip of factories stretches and belches all the way up to Chicago, 55 miles northwesterly up around the curve of the shoreline.

From Chesterton, Chicago's skyline beckons as it sparkles deceptively. But from noisy, smelly, gray-paved Chicago, my town looks like and is a soft, lush green paradise in comparison. They (the Chicagoans) love it here. They vacation here, buy summer homes here, keep their boats here. Why? The quiet is soothing to their jangled city nerves.

The Indiana Dunes State Park, the National Lakeshore, Michigan City, New Buffalo, Michigan, and up around as far as the eye can see, this inviting green and blue coastline curves and beckons to weary city dwellers looking across the lake from the Windy City. All along the coast, white sand beaches glow, pine groves scent the air, dunes wave golden with dunegrass, and seagulls drift silently in the sky as the lake laps insistently, gently--in, out...in, out.

Choose one of these environments--green or gray. Maybe this shocking juxtaposition of life and lack of it is what makes me so adamantly uncompromising about damages to the environment that we all depend upon for more than just survival. Chesterton is the dividing line between the green and gray.

Living on the edge, I've also paid the price extracted to support this nation's insatiable hunger for steel--I've smelled daily the stink of sulfur air, and seen the persistent threats to Lake Michigan from thermal and chemical pollutants resulting in the poisoning of the fish, and heard the noise-pollution of steel-hauling semi-trailers which roar muffler-free down highways damaged by their tremendous and dangerous weight. I pay all of these costs and have for a long time, so don't I have a right to be upset? I am, but my feelings are tangled.

My father was able to provide us with a comfortable life because of a steel industry job. He enjoyed good wages and benefits, and now enjoys an equally comfortable retirement. Our family has fared very well thanks to the mills. This leaves me in a turmoil as I proceed to bite the hand that fed me.

I am too well-educated and responsible not to bite it. It needs to be bitten. Robbing us all of a healthy future, it extracts too dear a cost to make steel--industry strikes an unfair deal with nature and the quality of human life.

The seeds were sown in me a long time ago by parents who were dedicated to doing their job in the best way they knew how. They taught me that my place is in this world, and I must be a genuine citizen of this world.

And so I strive to live honestly and be happy, but I'm never afraid to speak and will continue forever to question something that simply isn't true, looking at both sides, having lived on the edge of the green and gray.

SHAKESPEARE'S WOMEN

by Ann Otlewski

I'm convinced that Shakespeare liked his women and created his female characters with sensitivity and respect. From the lowliest Dolly Tearsheet, the prostitute in *King Henry IV* Part I, to the ruler Cleopatra, all his women reach out to our emotions and empathy. Most are essential to the plot in their drama, and many even control it. Given the situation of women in society during Elizabethan times, I think Shakespeare probably took some risks in endowing so many of his women with the intelligence and fearlessness to attempt to control their own lives. "These strong, attractive women have a clear sense of themselves as individuals, and they challenge the accepted patterns for women's behavior. Though compliance, self-sacrifice for males, dependence, and nurturance were the norm, these women were characterized by independence, self-control, and frequently defiance" (Dash 1). This is not to suggest that Shakespeare was the original feminist and that his characters are examples of women fulfilled by today's standards--they are not. It is true that his women do not venture too far from the acceptable behavior of his day, but I still can't fully agree with some of the harsher feminist criticism of today. Clara C. Park, in the article "As We Like It--How A Girl Can Be Smart And Still Be Popular", writes of Shakespeare's women, "Whoever and wherever they are, the sphere of action he allows them is severely limited. Nor is she in politics except in the interest of a male. Even *Cleopatra* is not a story of a ruler, but of love trades" (*The Woman's Part* 102). But even Ms. Park agrees that his respect for women is evident in all plays (102).

Paula S. Berggren, in "Female Sexuality as Power In Shakespeare's Plays", concludes that the "central element in Shakespeare's treatment of women is always their sex, not as a focus for cultural observation or social criticism, but as a mythic source of power, an archetypal symbol that arouses both love and loathing in the male" (*The Woman's Part* 18). She also writes that even though "male disguises allows them certain access to the male domain, the women do not challenge the masculine order and are happy to resume the women's role at the end of the play" (19). But Ms. Berggren does concede that, at least, this does show more flexibility for the women's roles.

Marilyn French also agrees that the only freedom and power the women have are when they are in male dress. She cites the example of Celia and Rosalind: equals when they are at court, but as soon as Rosalind is in disguise in the forest, she clearly has more power and freedom (113).

This question of women in male disguises and how it affects their behavior comes up frequently in feminist criticism. In *As You Like It*, Rosalind puts on male garb in order to avoid the problems feminine beauty might attract while she and Celia are traveling alone. From then on she dominates the play. She controls the action. In her article Clara Park says, "Rosalind is the heroine of her play. She moves the play--she's energetic, effective, and successful. She has the courage to accept exile and assume male dress" (107). Ms. Park believes this is unusual for a Shakespearean play. It's true that in male dress Rosalind can let her wit have free reign. She has great fun in her role and uses it to her benefit, molding her lover, Orlando, to her satisfaction. She can even ridicule him without repercussion in her speech about no man is ever having died for love (IV.i.83-95). In this play, according to another critic, "Men's follies are reined and dispelled by witty heroines, women enter, take control, and by their 'high and plenteous wit and invention' (IV.i.185) transform men from foolish lovers into sensible husbands (Neely 215). But these qualities do not just appear when Rosalind puts on pants. These same qualities are evident in Rosalind from the onset of the play, and even though society's restrictions do not allow her to make them obvious before her disguise, at least Shakespeare gave her the opportunity in an acceptable manner. Rosalind also shows no regret at having to go back to her woman's role. She believes in a "good man's love" (III.v.57-58), especially one made to order. I can't see her taking a back seat in her marriage to Orlando. Rosalind "fulfills the ideal of the spirited woman who tames herself" (Park 106).

Viola in *Twelfth Night* also disguises herself as a man after being shipwrecked on the shores of the country Illyria. She ends up as an attendant to the Duke Orsino, who asks her to help him win the love of Olivia. Viola fills this role so well that Olivia falls in love with her (thinking she's a man, of course). To complicate matters (true to Shakespearean comedic tradition), Viola falls in love with the Duke she's serving (who thinks she's a man). It all ends well at the arrival of Viola's identical twin brother, thought lost at sea. He ends up with Olivia, and Viola with the Duke. Unfortunately, Olivia may be in love with the sensitivity and understanding of Viola, who tells Olivia how she would court her--

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out "Olivia!" Oh, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me! (I.v.288-94)

It's hard to believe Sebastian, the brother, would have identical inner qualities even though he has identical looks. But in any case, here again a woman succeeds in taking on a man's role. Viola actually exists in the court among all males. At one point she's even put in the position of fighting a duel. I don't agree with Marilyn French that this is a humiliation for Viola, any more than it is for the more obviously cowardly Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Both tricked into the duel: both are trying to avoid it.

Viola is more passive than Rosalind in that she waits for events to unravel themselves. She does not take charge as Rosalind does. In the midst of all the confusion she says, "Time must untangle this, not I" (II.iii.41-42). However, she still succeeds well in her charade in the men's home environment. She is in the formal atmosphere of the court. In the Forest of Arden, all the people are in unfamiliar circumstances. So I believe Viola does admirably in displaying her character strengths and wit.

Neither of these women makes us feel that she prefers being a man. In fact, both take on these roles with a confidence that shows they have no doubt they can do it. It's almost as if they perform the whole act with a confident, wry smile.

Another type of ruse occurs in *All's Well That Ends Well*. Helena out-doctors the doctors and cures the King of some unexplained illness. In gratitude he grants her the choice of a husband. She wants Bertram, but he doesn't want her. They do marry, because the King gives Bertram no choice, but Bertram immediately leaves Helena, stipulating that he will not return until his is either a widower or until she gets the family heirloom ring from his finger and is pregnant with his child. Helena stoically begins her plan. She follows him, befriends the girl he plans to seduce, and arranges to take the girl's place in bed. Helena ends up pregnant and in possession of his ring. At the end of the play Bertram holds to his word and promises to be her true husband. One can't help but wonder why she still wants him or how Bertram can avoid feeling resentful of her underhanded tricks. But still, Helena does not wilt at home after her rejection. She succeeds in getting what she wants and is never a character to be pitied.

Another controversial woman in Shakespeare is Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Is she subdued by Petruchio? Most critics don't think so. Although, some women see it as a play about the subjugation of women, this depends on how one reads the text (Cook 27). One critic feels that "All her father has done is present her with a selection of idiots from which to choose a husband. She is very intelligent" (Cook 28). Even in Shakespeare's day the audience would have recognized that Kate and Petruchio are equals and fight as such (Cook 29).

Another critic, Janet Suzman, feels there is a "particular moment when Kate realizes what he's up to; the penny drops; and she changes. This farouche, tempermental, self-defensive girl; unsmiling and quick-brained, suddenly sees the joke, throws back her head, lets go, and laughs and laughs and laughs. Their love can now flourish" (Cook 29).

Pet: Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon!

Kat: The Moon! The sun. It is not moonlight now.

Pet: I say it is the moon that shines so bright.

Kat: I know it is the sun that shines so bright.

Pet: Now, by my mother's son, and that's myself

It shall be moon, or star, or what I list,

Or ere I journey to your father's house.

Go on, and fetch our horses back again.

Evermore crossed and crossed, nothing but crossed!

Kat: Forward, I pray since we have come so far,

And be it moon, or sun, or what you please.

An if you please to call it a rush candle,

Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.

Pet: I say it is the moon.

Kat: I know it is the moon.

Pet: Nay, then you lie. It is the blessed sun.

Kat: Then, God be blessed, it is the blessed sun.
But sun it is not, when you say it is not,
And the moon changes even as your mind.
What you will have it named, even that it is,
And so it shall be so for Katharine. (IV.v.1-23)

The overriding fact is that Kate falls in love with Petruchio, and it all stems from that (Cook 28).

Though Kate complies with her father's wishes and marries Petruchio, many of Shakespeare's women do not. Women like Juliet (*Romeo and Juliet*), Desdemona (*Othello*), Hermia (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and Ophelia (*Hamlet*), young, sheltered, and inexperienced, are very much under the control of their families, yet all but Ophelia defy their fathers and marry for love (Cook 1). As our textbook states, Shakespeare shares his views on love and marriage in these plays (5). Love outside marriage is disastrous. All the lovers that Shakespeare likes fall in love with honorable intentions, and all marry (even Romeo and Juliet) before they mate. Unfaithfulness brings disaster. Even the suggestion of it brings disaster to Desdemona and others: (These views differed from some of Shakespeare's contemporaries like Beaumont and Fletcher who thought that affairs made good comedy (6).)

Of the above mentioned women, only Hermia gets a happy ending for her courage in defying her father. Of course, this is the expected ending to a comedy. Juliet and Romeo choose to die rather than live without each other, even though they have the strength of character to plan a future away from their families forever. In these two plays the men suffer equally with the women and are just as willing to make the sacrifices necessary in order to be together.

Desdemona also leaves her father's home in secrecy, marries a much older man, and of another race, and defends her actions before the court of Venice most convincingly:

My Noble Father,
I do perceive here a divided duty.
To you I am bound for life and education,
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you, you are the lord of duty,
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband,
And so much duty as my mother showed
To you, preferring you before her father
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord (I.iii.180-88).

After this, can we believe Ms. Park that Desdemona is just a helpless victim, offered by Shakespeare to our sympathies (102)? I can believe this description better of Ophelia, who made no effort to be her own person.

In *Othello* we have three moral levels in women: Desdemona, the superhuman in goodness and innocence; Emilia, a realist; and Bianca, the sub-human, a prostitute. Yet all meet the same fate (French 215). Does Desdemona really not believe that people commit adultery? Why doesn't she say her hankie is lost? Does goodness have to be weak (Cook 96-97)? It's hard to justify Desdemona's inaction, when a few well-chosen words might have avoided the whole tragedy and saved both herself and her beloved Moor. Below are a few critic's views. Judith Cook writes, "Some believe she is young and immature not to sense the dangers in pleading Cassio's case. But there is much more to her than that. She has violated conventions by her marriage and knows

it. She puts her case both to her father and the senate simply indeed, but with a strong sense, courage, and plain speaking; she is a soldier's wife and fit to be so--even a man more besotted with love than Othello could not have addressed Ophelia as 'my fair warrior'; she can stand up to Othello for the sake of what she thinks to be right, even when he is in a dangerous mood and few people would care to face him. Her strength is the root of her submissiveness. Her innocence has a kind of obstinacy. With her last breath she denies Othello killed her" (96).

Coleridge writes, "It would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro. It would argue a disproportionateness, a want of balance in Desdemona which Shakespeare does not appear to have in the least contemplated" (Cook 95).

A harsher view by Irene Dash is that "Desdemona starts out as a strong woman, but becomes submissive after marriage because that is the expected 'role' (116). She loses her identity as an individual, and since she doesn't fully understand her new role, she commits the blunder of speaking for Cassio too much. She doesn't yet accept that they are no longer equals. Pity never enters her vocabulary to him and Duty never enters his to her" (117).

A.C. Bradley writes, "Desdemona is helplessly passive. She can do nothing whatever. She cannot retaliate even in speech; no, not even in silent feeling...She is helpless because her nature is infinitely sweet and her love absolute...Desdemona's suffering is like that of the most loving of dumb creatures tortured without cause by the being she adores" (179).

Emilia, in contrast, is the link between innocence and treachery. "Emilia combines sharp-tongued honesty with warm affection. Her views are midway between the men and the women. She rejects the identification with Bianca yet sympathizes with female promiscuity. She corrects Desdemona's occasional naivete, but defends her chastity. She comprehends male jealousy and espouses sexual equality, but is free of jealousy herself. She sees cuckoldry and marital affection as compatible. 'Who would not make her husband a cuckold to make a monarch' (IV.iii.74-75)? She tolerates male fancy; the dangers of such tolerance become evident in this play as they never do in comedies" (Neely 219).

Perhaps the strength of the women in this play is best understood by the power they have, but do not use, to prevent the tragedy. "The women's wit is constrained, their power over men lost, and the men are therefore transformed downwards" (Neely 215). "*Othello* ends as it begins, in a world of men--political, loveless, and undomesticated" (Fiedler 194). "In this play romantic love is destroyed by male friendship which itself soon disintegrates. Meanwhile, friendship between the women is established and dominates the play's final scene" (Neely 225).

A marriage of love and respect is found in the relationship of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. She, along with Cleopatra, is one of Shakespeare's mature women. She knows what she wants and has no qualms about doing whatever necessary to obtain it. Actually, Lady Macbeth is a paradox. She is one of the strongest, and then one of the weakest characters in Shakespeare (*Shakespeare's Ladies*--video). At the beginning she is so aggressive and so sure of herself--or is she? She says she is not going to let the "milk of human kindness" in Macbeth's character get in the way of the crown she wants (I.v.18). She asks the spirits to "unsex" her and give her the male characteristics she needs to carry the deed through (I.v.42). Is all this tough talk just to cover her doubts? She definitely is the driving force behind Duncan's murder, providing her husband with the strength he lacks to do the job. She never stops to consider the

morality or future consequences of what she's doing, and suffers for it later when she cannot accept what she's done. In contrast, Macbeth worries incessantly at the start, but after he accepts what the true cost of the crown will be, he goes on without looking back. Ironically, it seems that Lady Macbeth starts weakening and going mad just as her husband ceases to consult her about his plans, as before Banquo's murder. He saps her strength until she has none left, forcing her to kill herself from guilt.

Cleopatra also commits suicide, but I don't think she is weak. A.L. Rouse says she is "Infinitely various, changing from one iridescent mood to another; mercurial and bewitching; ready to rage and storm and beat her attendants" (135). In his opinion, Cleopatra is able to seduce and control one of the most powerful men in the Roman world because she is "cunning past men's thoughts...an enchantress, almost a sorceress" (135). Is her suicide a weakness? I say NO. She does choose death because of her great love for Mark Antony, but let it not be overlooked that she is also facing a hostile conquering army that will not treat her lightly. But she keeps her wits till the very end--her treasure store is never found.

I have not read all of Shakespeare and have, therefore, not dealt with all his female characters. However, I think it's still safe to say that none of his women is a token, a stock character, kept in the background, or portrayed unfavorably, except perhaps where human nature has allowed that there are weak as well as strong men and women, and smart as well as not so smart. "Shakespeare reflected the women of his age, the witty learned ladies, independent wives, and even rural simpletons" (Cook 6).

Some say one reason Shakespeare's women were liberated was because his audience was aware that they were all played by men, so this gave him more freedom in his female characters. That may have been true, but that doesn't account for the versatility, vividness, and believability of his women. The innocence of Desdemona, the intelligence of Portia, the sexual power of Cleopatra, the evil and coldness of Lady Macbeth and Lear's daughters--one can go on and on. I'm convinced of Shakespeare's sincerity and respect for these women. It's also obvious to me that he was well aware of women's influence in his world and society. Whether old or young, good or evil, smart or dumb, his women characters are probably unparalleled in all of literature.

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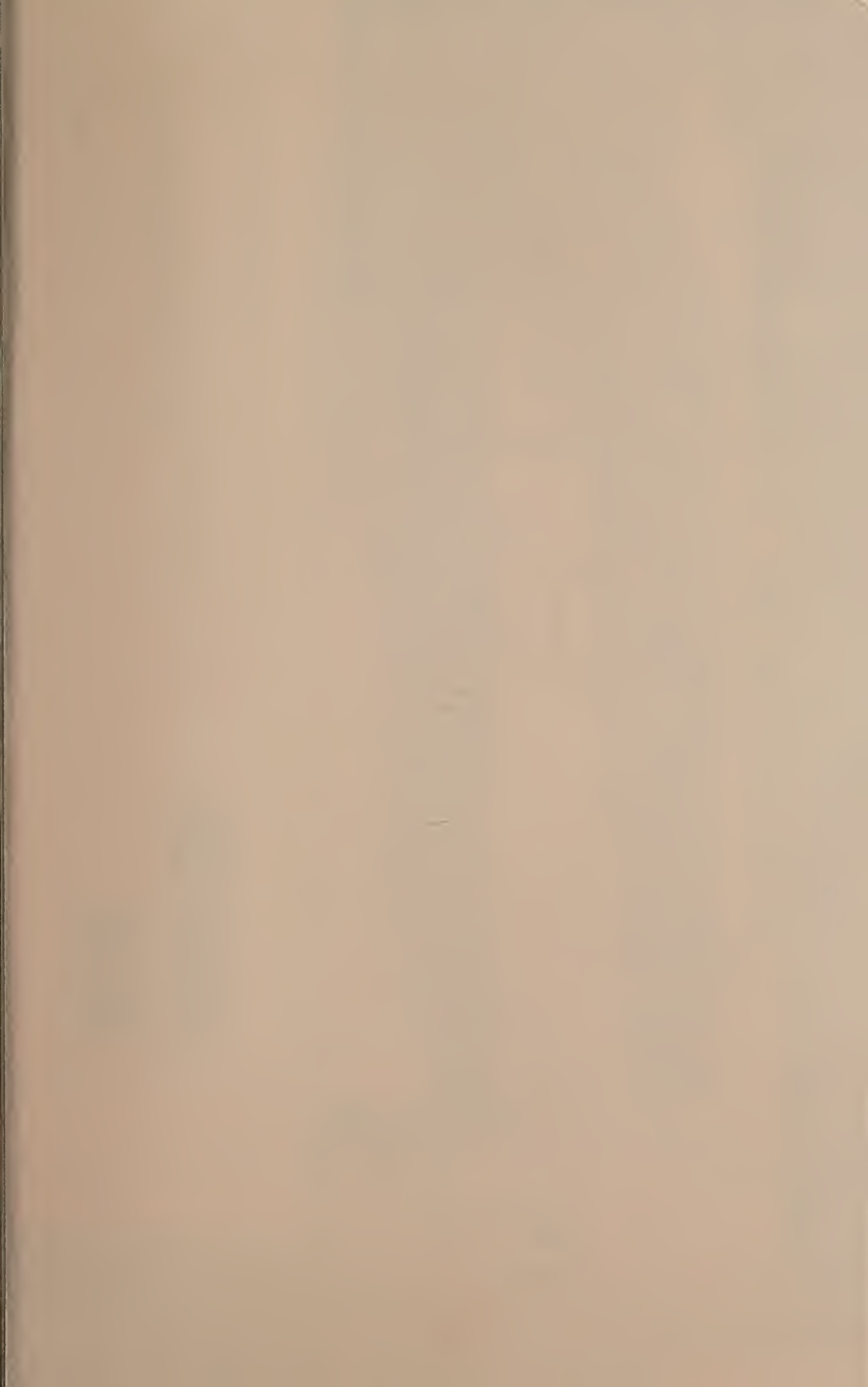
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